

April 1, 2013

TO: Emma Howard

Regional Planning Department

320 W. Temple Street, Room 1354

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Ms. Howard:

Grassroots Coalition and The Ballona Ecosystem Education Project have the following comments on the Draft Significant Ecological Areas Plan and Ordinance:

- 1) The Ballona Ecological Area is a very valuable place for wildlife and plants even without restoration plans. It is a seasonal wetland area and has had rare vernal pools in it.

- 2) Many local experts have commented on the value of this rare coastal wetland ecosystem. The California Coast has already lost 95% of its wetlands from development. The last 5% that are left are extremely critical to save. The Ballona Ecological Area needs to be extended and even buffer zones added. Self-sustaining ecosystems are what the County should strive for.

Below are comments from wetland ecosystem experts regarding the value of the Ballona ecosystem:

In 2006, Dr. Joy Zedler, wetland restoration specialist at San Diego State University stated that the region has a shortage of high marsh for animals and salt marsh bird's beak, marsh-upland transition for rare shrubs (e.g. box thorn) that are used by animals. One could also list maritime scrub, which remains in several places.

Dr. Wayne Ferren, wetland expert, has stated that seasonal wetlands are rare. And, that Coastal prairie- historically extensive around LAX-- are all gone. They are a complex ecosystem of prairie and vernal pool habitats.

He also says wet grasslands formed extensive areas were also palustrine wetlands above highest high tide and native grasslands were out there.

Dr. Richard Ambrose has commented regarding Ballona -historical native grassland prairie ecosystems previously existed in the area.

3) There are some rare wildlife that are rare in the southwest and locally such as the burrowing owl.

The state listed endangered- Belding's Savannah Sparrow is non-migratory and finds its home across all of Ballona.

Special and critical care of non-disturbance needs to be given to this and all of Ballona's rare and endangered wildlife and plant life in order to sustain current populations and allow for growth.

4) There is potential for introduction of endangered salt marsh birds beak, rare meadow, savannah grasses etc.

Winter rains cause small mammals to be near the surface and are thus a major food source in winter. (Thus there is a need for upland)

5) Other areas should be included in the Ballona Ecological Area, such as the Ballona Lagoon Marine Preserve:

Ballona Lagoon is one of the few remaining saltwater lagoons on the California coast. The lagoon runs parallel to the ocean between the Marina del Rey channel and Washington Street, and it supplies water to the Venice canal system.

The lagoon is protected from tidal surges and currents and is used by many marine species as a nursery for their young. Seaweeds provide a place for eggs to cling and protection to frail swimming young to grow. The lagoon's shallow water allows the sand and mud bottom to act as a huge solar panel, producing and storing heat. The heat generated warms the water (sometimes to 20 degrees warmer than the ocean), producing an incubator effect which speeds egg and larval development.

The importance of Ballona Lagoon to marine life and to resident and migratory birds was recognized by area citizens, who formed the Ballona Lagoon Marine Preserve to protect this valuable natural resource.

Sea Hare, Navanax, Sponges, Mussels, Crabs, (including the northern most colony of Fiddler Crab), Octopus, Sculpin, Round Stingray, Topsmelt, Grunion, Shrimp, Bay Bleny, Halibut and more all call Ballona Lagoon home.

The area is also heavily utilized by the endangered Least Tern.

6) It is very important to save the Ballona Ecosystem due to a combination of factors affecting the planet, such as global warming, sea rise, polluted waters, loss of wildlife species, etc. For example, this year has seen a very large number of sea lion pups beaching themselves and dying. No one knows why at this point and it will have to be studied. Also, Monarch butterflies are decreasing in numbers to Mexico, only about 20% of the normal amounts are arriving in Mexico. So the monarch butterflies on the

west coast, some of which rest on their migratory journey in the wetlands, are even more important to maintain.

7) We also support the comments made by the Ballona Restoration Committee of the Sierra Club.

8) The entire Ballona region needs to be included as an SEA in order to address the complex biodiversity and bioregions that currently exist. Marina del Rey, Oxford Lagoon, Del Rey and Ballona Lagoon.. the regional makeup of all the remnant portions of Ballona need to be included in the SEA.

Thank you very much,

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